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Sermon

The Armour of God

Ephesians 6:10-24

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Finally in this letter to the Ephesians, Paul teaches on resisting evil.

What is the nature of this evil?

Some say one thing; some say another. I imagine some of you will think one and some the other. If you don't believe there are evil spirits or a devil you probably feel you have to apply Paul's words to human agencies. And if you are in conflict with corrupt human systems, it may very well be that the same principles would apply.

I understand this passage to be about spiritual conflict with spiritual powers of evil. That may be a scary thought for some of you. I am sorry about that – all I can say is that if that is the enemy it is better to know it and that in practice as you get used to the idea and have dealt with some encounters it is not so frightening.

By way of background, we should note that Jesus is recorded as being tempted in the wilderness by the devil.¹ He refers to the devil several times and not just in ways which could be interpreted as theoretical evil or stories. He explains the parable of the sower and says the enemy is the devil²; he refers to Satan binding the crippled woman³ and wanting to sift Peter⁴. The writers of the gospels, Hebrews and Revelation, Luke, Paul, Peter, James, Jude, John all refer Satan, the Devil or the Evil One. Deliverance from evil spirits was a significant part of the ministry of Jesus and the apostles in the gospels and in Acts.

What does Paul tell us about the enemy in this passage?

He says we are to stand against the Devil's schemes (v11). Our struggle is not with flesh and blood which is a Hebrew idiom of human (v12). He says it is against "the rulers, the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." Rulers and authorities would mean human systems except that he has just written that we are not fighting flesh and blood. The powers of this dark world is literally, "against the world-rulers of this darkness" and then he says against spiritual things of the evil in the heavenly places. Furthermore, in verse 16, it the flaming arrows of the evil one.

¹ Mt 4:1 ff

² Mt 13:39

³ Lk 13:16

⁴ Lk 22:31

Friends, Paul is clear that he is talking about a spiritual battle against evil powers. You can deny that if you wish but you might be wise to consider the saying, “Know your enemy.” That is not Biblical but wise. It is an adaption from the *Art of War*, an ancient Chinese treatise on how to wage war. The author, Sun Tzu, wrote:

So it is said that if you know your enemies and know yourself, you can win a hundred battles without a single loss. If you only know yourself, but not your opponent, you may win or may lose. If you know neither yourself nor your enemy, you will always endanger yourself.

I do not intend to launch into a study of the enemy, but it is well worth noting that the name “Satan” means accuser and he is referred to as the Accuser of the Brothers (Rev 12:10). As we will see, that is important.

Nature of armour

Paul likens our defences to a Roman soldier’s armour. Roman soldiers were everywhere – they were like the police force of the Empire and Paul was a Roman citizen. Furthermore, we know Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter. In verse 20, he says he is in chains. The normal way was to chain the prisoner to a soldier. Thus Paul would be very conscious of soldiers and armour.

Putting on this armour

V10-11: “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.”

We do not have the means by ourselves to fight or defend ourselves. Our strength is in the Lord and his mighty power. So we are fools if we try to fight independently for him. We must depend on him.

On the cross, Jesus defeated evil. That defeat is being extended and worked out as the Kingdom advances. All the pieces of armour are characteristics of Jesus. He is truth; he is the Word of God; he is righteous. Peace and faith are gifts of God. Jesus achieves salvation for us.

It is not that we have work these qualities up – no we are to make use of what we are given. All these things are free gifts when we are in Christ. But if we don’t use them they are no use to us.

Paul tells us three times to stand. That is, hold our ground. “Put on the armour of God so that ... you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then...”⁵

Truth

Jesus said that he is the Truth. Truth is compared to the soldier’s belt. The belt has several purposes: it gives lumbar support; it holds the breastplate down; the sword hangs from it; it was used to hold up the long garment so the soldier was not obstructed by cloth.

This makes it a good symbol for truth. Truth is foundational to most of the rest of the armour. We need to know the truth about righteousness, peace, faith, salvation. The sword hung from the belt; the word of God is true (Jesus said, “Your word is truth.”⁶) The truth helps prevent us from being tripped up by falsehood, misunderstanding or error.

We need to live in truth – no falsehoods. Falsehoods give the enemy opportunity. We need to live in the light of the truth – operate in conformity to what is true rather than following falsehoods and deceptions.

Righteousness

When we are in Christ, we trust that his death on the cross has atoned for all our sins. We are given the gift of righteousness.

Romans 3:22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

⁵ Ephesians 6:13-14

⁶ Jn 17:17

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

So the breastplate of righteousness is not what we achieve by good works but the gift we are given when we confess our sins and trust in his forgiveness. To put on the breastplate is to make sure our sins are confessed. A soldier would not let there be a gap in his armour because the opponent could then stick a sword into the defenceless hole. So too, we make sure we have confessed our sins and then we know we are protected. Do you remember I said Satan is accuser of the brothers? His chief weapon is accusation. If we have unconfessed sin he will accuse us and we will falter knowing we are guilty. If our sin is forgiven and we know the **truth** that we are given Jesus' **righteousness** then we can be confident and his attacks will not harm us.

Many Christians suffer from condemnation. That is when we have been forgiven by God but we hear the accusations of the enemy and believe them. So we keep pleading for forgiveness from God. IF that is the case, you need to claim the forgiveness you have asked for and tell the enemy to stop bothering you.

Peace

Peace is a gift to us: Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you."⁷ If we have been given it, we need to make use of it. Choose to believe you have it and walk in it. Walk in peace.

I have pondered this idea of peace being like sandals. What makes sense to me is that when you walk over rough ground, your footwear protects your feet so you can stride boldly without concern. So too, when you have peace in difficult circumstances you can get on with living without fretting about the difficulties – this is "the peace which passes understanding"⁸ – when you have it, you wonder how you can be so calm in the circumstances.

Faith

Romans 10:17 "... faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." We cannot generate faith by trying – again it is something we receive from the Lord. When the Lord communicates with you, that word generates faith in you. The shield is both that sort of immediate response to revelation and the accumulated trust you have built up through your experience of Christ.

When a crisis hits you, what you need is faith in God to get you through. So the idea of faith as a shield is helpful. Paul develops this further saying, "you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one." In those days, they would sometimes shoot flaming arrows. A wet shield could stop them. So for us, flaming arrows of the evil one are lies thrown at us. When they come, we can counter them by having faith in what God has said rather than in what the enemy tells us. But that takes a decision to do it. Too often we accept the lies and so are brought down.

Salvation

Obviously, salvation is a gift. We accept the salvation Christ has won for us. That is peace and safety of body, mind and spirit. Salvation gives us hope which affects our thinking for good.

Word of God

The Word of God is the short sword of the Spirit. This is the *rhema* word the spoken, immediate, inspired word of God. When you are under attack, ask God for the scriptures to use as weapons. As they come to mind, they are inspired and you can use them to affirm the truth, your faith will be built up, and you will be helped to stay in right relationship with God.

All Prayer

We should not forget the next item: verse 18 All Prayer.

⁷ John 14:27

⁸ Phil 4:7

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Prayer is a powerful weapon. We pray in the Spirit being directed by him. This prayer is comprehensive: All occasions; all kinds of prayers and requests; always (better “with all perseverance”); for all the saints.

On all occasions : Note this is not at all times. The word is Kairos which is a significant time. So we are to pray on all significant times. That is more manageable than at all times – I have tried to pray continually and failed – I can’t think of two things at once.

All kinds of prayers and requests: That is comprehensive – there isn’t just one way of praying.

With all perseverance: We are to be alert and watchful as we keep at it.

For all the saints: This is not referring to the canonised saints. Paul is referring to ordinary Christians. We need to support each other in this warfare not only be concerned for ourselves.

Sit, Walk, Stand – was the title of Watchman Nee’s book on Ephesians. He brilliantly summarized this whole book into those three actions. We sit with Christ in Heavenly places – that is our status in Christ; we walk in love as Christ has loved us – that is our manner of life, our conduct, as a result of being in Christ; we stand against the devil’s schemes – that is how we fight against evil.

Sit! Walk! Stand! Will you do that? Will you sit in the role and status you have been given by Christ? Will you walk in the manner of life he calls you to? Will you stand against the enemy’s schemes?

Closing words

In closing, Paul prays peace on them and us. He prays for love with faith to come from the Father and Jesus. And he blesses those who love Jesus with grace.

As you sit in Christ may you know his grace. As you walk in his way, may you know love with faith from the Father and Jesus. As you stand against the enemy’s deceits may you know the peace of Christ. Amen.